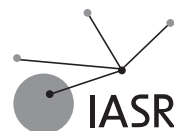




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Article

The Effects of Political Ideology on Foreigner Sentiment: A Comparison of Young Adults and the Youth in South Korea

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Abstract

Extant studies have shown the significance of political ideology on attitudes towards foreigners, but most have focused primarily on the adult population. This study investigates the effects of ideology on foreigner sentiment among South Korean youth, posing the following questions: What are some of the main predictors that influence youth support for various immigrant groups living in Korea? More specifically, do the political ideologies of Korean adolescents influence their attitudes towards foreigners, similarly to that of the adult population? Using an original survey conducted in January 2024, this study contends that political ideology, a significant predictor for adults, is less influential among adolescents. Instead, for Korean youth, practical and humanistic factors such as the contributions made by foreigners and state support for minorities are more critical in influencing their support. This suggests that sentiment towards foreigners among the youth fundamentally derive from different factors than that of adults. The results suggest that these determinants should be explored further, since the youth will play a vital role in integrating immigrant groups and in shaping the country's future policies and norms.

Keywords

Korean youth, Foreigner sentiment, Political ideology, Public opinion, South Korea

Introduction

Over the past few decades, numerous studies have investigated attitudes and sentiments toward foreigner and immigrant groups. This has been particularly the case in countries experiencing an influx of immigration. Countries facing challenges like population decline, declining fertility

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rates, and a shrinking workforce, have particularly seen increased demands for immigration and a surge in foreign populations (OECD, 2024). This demographic shift has heightened focus on not only how effectively immigrants integrate into their new societies but also how local populations perceive them—whether as valuable contributors to society or as economic, cultural, or social threats.

While some studies have reported positive sentiments towards immigrants, the bulk of prior research suggests pervasive negative sentiment, manifesting as xenophobia as well as various forms of explicit and implicit discrimination.¹ Yet existing literature on anti-foreigner sentiment has predominantly focused on attitudes among the adult electorate, with limited studies examining immigrant sentiments among the youth, particularly high school adolescents, despite their growing role in shaping future policies and norms within their respective countries.² Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive studies examining predictors that influence youth attitudes towards foreigner groups and whether these predictors differ from the adult population; therefore, such comparative analysis can shed light on how sentiments towards immigrants might evolve. In this way, investigating the attitudes of the youth is crucial, as they will play a vital part in integrating immigrants into host societies.

This study addresses a significant knowledge gap by exploring youth attitudes towards immigrant groups in South Korea (hereafter Korea). Historically known for its homogeneity, Korea was once considered an exception to the growing global diversity (Kim, 2015; Lim, 2009). Until the late 1980s, the country had limited experience with immigrants; however, labor shortages and gender imbalances, particularly in rural areas, led to a steady rise in immigration (Lee, 2010; Lee et al., 2021). Since then, Korea has been “transitioning to a multiethnic and multicultural society” (Kim, 2015). The foreign population in Korea has grown significantly, from approximately 245,000 (about 0.5 percent of the population) in 2000 to 2.51 million (4.89 percent of the population) in 2023. Through this rapidly growing shift, Korea’s transition from a homogenous society to an increasingly multicultural nation presents a compelling case study for exploring immigrant sentiment.

Through this case study, this article attempts to answer the following questions: What are some of the main predictors that influence youth support for various immigrant groups living in Korea? More specifically, do the political ideologies of Korean adolescents influence their attitudes towards foreigners, similarly to that of the adult population?

This article argues that political ideology functions as a significant predictor for Korean adults in their sentiment towards foreigners, yet it is less influential among adolescents. Instead, for Korean youth, practical and humanistic factors such as the contributions made by foreigners as well as government support for minorities are more critical factors in influencing their support. This suggests that key indicators of foreigner sentiment for adults plays a less significant role in shaping young Koreans’ attitudes towards immigrants. Instead, sentiment towards foreigners among the youth fundamentally derive from different factors than that of adults, ones that may inherently be less political, which may lead to significant generational shifts and potentially lead towards greater inclusivity within Korean society.

To explore further, the study utilizes two original surveys conducted in Korea in January and February 2024. The survey gauges their support for four different immigrant groups in Korea: foreign spouses, foreign labor workers, Korean-Chinese, and North Korean defectors.³ The results suggest that more conservative political ideologies influence negative attitudes towards foreigners among young adults, particularly Korean-Chinese. However, political ideology does not significantly influence attitudes among teenagers, except for Korean-Chinese. Rather, youth sentiment is more strongly influenced by the belief that foreigners help the economy and the view that the government should care for minorities. Ultimately, political ideology is only

a determinant for adults, indicating that there are significant differences in the predictors that influence adolescents and the adult population in Korea. This suggests that additional efforts are needed to explore the predictors that influence sentiment among the youth, since they will play a crucial role in facilitating the social integration of foreigners living in the country and helping Korea develop into a successful multicultural society as they join the adult electorate.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. First, the study provides a general overview of predictors influencing attitudes towards immigrants in Korea. Here, it discusses the role of political ideology in influencing attitudes among young adults but less so among adolescents, highlighting generational differences. The study then presents potential predictors for immigrant sentiment among Korean youth and describes different immigrant groups in Korea. After, it outlines the data and methods used, followed by the presentation of the results. Finally, it concludes with a summary of the findings and a discussion of potential avenues for future research.

Predictors of Immigrant Sentiment

Existing research has extensively explored the structural factors that influence attitudes toward immigrants, both within the host communities and among individuals originally from these communities.⁴ Immigrants may be perceived favorably by certain groups within the host population, such as those with higher levels of social capital, education, and contact with outgroup members as well as those who see immigrants as strengthening the workforce and contributing to multiculturalism (Amir, 1969; Thomsen & Olsen, 2016; Thomsen & Rafiqi, 2017). Nevertheless, negative reactions, hostility, and backlash towards foreigners remain prevalent, often attributed to economic anxieties (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Semyonov et al., 2006), such as the state of the national economy as well as individual concerns about income and employment security. Additionally, others argue cultural factors also play a role (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014), as locals may perceive immigrants as a threat to their values, identities, and cultural norms (Tajfel et al., 1979).

In the Korean context, studies similarly reveal that anti-immigrant or anti-foreigner sentiment is rooted in economic, cultural, and social threats. This includes economic factors such as job insecurity and economic competition, financial burden on social services as well as the welfare system, economic development (Chang & Kang, 2018), burden on the national economy (Chang, 2019), and individual socioeconomic status (Lee et al., 2024). Cultural factors include social capital (Lee et al., 2024), citizenship (Chang, 2019), and education (Hundt, 2016; Park & Tuxhorn, 2023). Moreover, ethnic nationalism and cultural homogeneity (Ha & Jang, 2015; Seol & Skrentny, 2009; Shin, 2006; Shin et al., 1999) can foster an ethnic national identity (a unitary nation, or *danil minjok*) that can override other forms of identity, thus hindering diversity and tolerance towards other groups.⁵ In addition, social factors such as contact frequency and size of the immigration population (Cho et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2021), negative media portrayals of foreigners (Park, 2014), poor immigration policies (Lee, 2010; Song, 2016); and trust in political institutions (Chang & Kang, 2018) are also predictors of foreigner sentiment.

Indeed, various factors can fuel opposition to immigrants and perceptions of immigration-induced threats, leading Korean citizens to view foreigners as an outgroup that threatens the ingroup for various reasons (Watson, 2012). According to power theory and group threat theory, members of the ingroup (those originally from the host society) often view the outgroup (foreigners) as a threat or as competitors in economic, social, and political spheres. This perception can lead to increased animosity towards the outgroup, who are seen as taking away their resources and opportunities (Blalock, 1967).

Political Ideology and Foreigner Sentiment among Young Adults

Among the various predictors influencing foreigner sentiment, political ideology has been discussed quite extensively in the extant literature (Brooks et al., 2016; Jost et al., 2009; Kiehne & Ayon 2016). Political ideology can exert a powerful influence on individual attitudes towards immigrant groups, especially when viewed on a left (progressive) to right (conservative) spectrum (Leykin & Gorodzeisky, 2024; Saxton & Benson, 2003). Those on the political right are more likely to harbor anti-foreigner sentiment than those with more progressive leanings within the ingroup (Wilkes et al., 2007). This is grounded in the tendency of right-wing ideologies to blame immigrants for unemployment and other socioeconomic and cultural issues (Pardos-Prado, 2011), prioritize national homogeneity, and advocate for stricter border controls. Conversely, those on the political left tend to prioritize diversity, cultural openness, and inclusivity (De Haas et al., 2020; Leykin & Gorodzeisky, 2024).

Similarly in South Korea, sentiment towards foreigners similarly aligns with political ideologies, where more conservative ideologies have consistently been negatively associated with foreigner sentiment while more progressive ideologies have been positively correlated with foreigner sentiment (Chang, 2019; Gouda & Song, 2024; Jang, 2021; Kim, 2004; Kim et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Rich et al., 2021).⁶ Individuals with more progressive ideologies tend to feel “emotionally closer” to minorities and foreigners (Hwang, 2007; Kim, 2004), whereas those with right-wing political ideologies are less tolerant of diversity (Leykin & Gorodzeisky, 2024) and more likely to hold anti-immigrant views (Callens and Meuleman, 2017).⁷

Like what prior research has shown, this may similarly be the case for young Korean adults who have already, for the most part, developed their political views and have been exposed to certain stances regarding immigration that has been initiated and perpetuated by their political affiliations. Moreover, motivated reason may play a role in this relationship, as young adults may feel motivated to accept news that reflect their preexisting dispositions (Brooks et al., 2016). Since they already view themselves as liberal or conservative, they will be more likely to accept welcome news and reluctant to accept unwelcome information regarding immigrants that fits their political beliefs (Brooks et al., 2016). As such, we are likely to see a direct correlation between political ideology and immigrant sentiment among the adult electorate. That is, young Korean adults with more conservative political ideologies are less likely to support immigrant groups than those with more liberal political ideologies.

Political Ideology and Foreigner Sentiment among the Youth

In the case of the Korean youth, however, the effects of political ideology on foreigner sentiment may not be so significant. Despite the strong influence of political ideology on immigrant sentiment in Korea among the adult electorate, adolescents have not yet fully undergone socialization. In general, adolescents are socialized through principles, ideals, and norms are often passed down from one generation to the next (Jeannet & Dražanová, 2023). Through this, their political attitudes are shaped by the climate and people surrounding them, which includes families, friends, school, and the broader national environment, as they are exposed to values via the “political tenor” during their formative years (Levin, 1961; Miklikowska, 2016). However, adolescents are still in the process of being socialized, and as such, the way in which they interpret and engage with social issues is not fully determined.

In addition, a shift seems to be occurring among young adolescents. This young generation is significantly different than previous ones, as they are not narrowly shaped just by their personal environments. This generation grew up in a consolidated democracy and a more globalized,

increasingly multicultural environment than previous generations with access to information in various forms and from different sources. Because of this, the youth tend to be more educated and open-minded than previous generations and are more likely to exhibit positive sentiment towards foreigners relative to their older counterparts (Kong et al., 2010; Mayda, 2006). Their exposure to an emerging globalized culture and a reduced emphasis on ethnic and cultural homogeneity further positions them to view immigrant groups more inclusively and even as members of the nation (Campbell, 2015).

This sentiment can overpower political ideology, especially since their political views are still in the process of being formed and they have been less exposed to the messages sent out by political groups. Unlike their adult counterparts, the youth are unlikely to struggle with motivated reasoning, i.e., have preexisting political dispositions that will influence their beliefs, since their political dispositions are still changing. Therefore, contrary to what the existing literature suggests, the significance of political ideology may be less pronounced among the youth and is less likely to be a key predictor of immigrant sentiment. That is, political ideology is not significantly associated with immigrant sentiment among Korean youth.

Similarities and Differences between Young Koreans and the Korean Youth: Political Ideology vs. Outcome-Oriented Factors

Despite not being influential regarding foreigner sentiment, there may be similarities in political ideology among young Koreans as well as Korean youth. Political ideology ultimately refers to the framework through which individuals interpret and engage with various social issues. When new information is squired through news and other sources, political ideology often serves as a basic guideline to decide whether to support or oppose it. In other words, political ideology, which is essentially a collection of social values, provides consistency when determining attitudes towards issues. Key areas related to political ideology include attitudes about the role of the state and equality. As such, it can be expected that those with similar ideologies will have similar attitudes regarding the role of the state and equality.

However, when it comes to predictors related to foreigner sentiment among the youth, there may be other practical, more outcome-oriented, determinants that may be significant in influencing foreigner sentiment. This includes practical factors as well as humanistic ones rather than political ones. From the practical perspective, young individuals may be more likely to be influenced by whether foreigners contribute to the country, i.e., whether foreigners make Korea a better place to live. This can be both economically, where foreigners pursue available employment opportunities or contribute their taxes, or generally, where foreigners improve the quality of life in the country.

From the humanistic side, young individuals may be influenced by the desire to help those that may be considered marginalized groups. That is, Korean youth may view foreigners as minorities in the country that should be supported. This can stem from a high sense of responsibility, where they believe they should do better to protect those in need within the country, and it can also stem from the belief that the government should provide more care and protection for minorities.

Ultimately, these expectations may have developed in the democratic environments in which they grew, but they can play a critical role in increasing positive views towards foreigners, more so than political ideology. As such, among adolescents, positive evaluations towards foreigners are more strongly influenced by economic perceptions and beliefs about the government's role in supporting minorities.

Foreigner Groups in South Korea

In the case of Korea, there are various foreigner groups. The existing literature has categorized and analyzed these groups in various ways (Bidet, 2009; Denney & Green, 2020; Ha & Jang, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2021; Kim et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021, 2024; Rich et al., 2021; Son, 2016; Yoon, 2010). Though there are several ways to examine foreigner groups in Korea, this study focuses on four major groups that comprise most immigrants in the country (Yoon et al., 2008). These include foreign laborers, who began migrating to Korea early in the 1980s and continue to constitute the largest proportion of immigrants, predominantly employed in the so-called 3-D industries. Foreign spouses, primarily foreign brides (Kim, 2011), are another group, with international marriages accounting for around 10 percent of the total marriages in Korea (Oh, 2024). Additionally, ethnic Koreans from China, also known as Korean-Chinese or *Joseonjok* (Lee et al., 2014; Seol & Skrentny, 2009), as well as North Korean migrants or defectors (Yoon et al., 2008), are also discussed in the literature.

The first two groups consist of individuals without Korean ethnicity, lacking specific or historical ties to Korea, and often less proficient in the language. On the other hand, the latter two groups consist of foreigners that can be described as ethnically Korean but not originally from Korea. They may speak Korean and have familial ties to Korea, making them culturally closer to Korean citizens (Denney & Green 2020; Lee et al., 2014). Moreover, they come from countries often viewed more favorably by progressive administrations and less so by conservative ones (Choi, 2018).

Data, Methods, and Results

The data used for this research comprises two original surveys that were conducted in Korea and administered by Hankook Research, using a SKT member list and a survey panel. The first is a youth sample of South Korean residents collected from January 11, 2024, to January 26, 2024. The sample consists of 1,058 high school students residing in Seoul, currently enrolled in their first or second year of study. The second survey was conducted from January 19, 2024 to February 3, 2024. The sample consists of 1,026 young South Korean residents residing in Seoul that were born between the years 1999 and 2004. Both data sets are observed in this study.

For the analyses, we first provide some descriptive results regarding the survey items used in the study. Specifically, we explore sentiment for each foreigner group among young Korean adults and the Korean youth. Then we observe political ideology and attitudes regarding the role of the state and provide a comparison between the two groups. After we explore whether political ideologies influence attitudes towards foreigners using an OLS regression analysis of attitudes towards various foreign groups among young Korean adults as well as Korean adolescents.

For the descriptive statistics, we utilize various survey items. This includes four survey items assessing attitudes and favorability towards different foreigner groups residing in Korea including foreign spouses, foreign labor workers, Korean-Chinese, and North Korean defectors. Respondents were asked to rate their favorability towards each group on a 0 to 5 scale, with 0 indicating completely negative sentiment and 5 indicating entirely positive sentiment. The survey items were as follows (see Appendix for Korean wording).

- *Thoughts on the subject: Attitudes towards foreigners:*
 - *Korean-Chinese living in Korea.*
 - *North Korean defectors living in South Korea.*

- *Foreigners who have married Koreans (marriage immigrants).*
- *Foreign workers working in Korea.*

In addition, we also explore individuals' perceived political ideologies and the role of the state, including whether the respondent would oppose governance by an unelected leader in times of national crises, whether the government should always adhere to the law, and whether protests against the government should be allowed in times of crises (see Appendix for Korean wording).

- *Political Ideology: Self-reported political orientation on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 indicated liberal orientation, 5 indicated moderate orientation, and 10 indicated conservative orientation.*
- *Strong Leader: Whether a strong, unelected leader can govern during a national crisis.*
- *Government Breaching Law: Whether it is important for the government to break laws to overcome national crises.*
- *Allow Anti-Government Protests: Whether anti-government protests should be allowed even in a national crises.*

For the regression analyses, we utilize the same political ideology variable and include several other questions. This includes survey items on gender, political interest, economic help, contribution to development, Korean pride, and care responsibility (see Appendix for Korean wording).

- *Gender: 1 for male, 2 for female.*
- *Political Interest: Scale from 0, not interested at all, to 4, very interested.*
- *Economic Help: 1 for highly detrimental, 3 for neutral, and 5 for highly beneficial.*
- *Contribution to Development: 1 for significantly worsening living standards, 3 for neutral, and 5 for significantly improving living standards.*
- *Korean Pride: Pride in being Korean, where 1 indicates not proud, 3 signals neutral, and 5 means very proud.*
- *Care Responsibility: The responsibility of the government to care for the needy (1 indicates not responsible, 2 means somewhat responsible, 3 means largely responsible, and 4 indicates fully responsible).*

Results

Descriptive Results

The figure below shows the distribution of responses to survey items regarding foreigner sentiment. As expected, the attitudes of adolescents toward foreigners are more positive compared to youths. It is noteworthy that in all four categories of foreigner groups, sentiment among adolescents is more positive. Interestingly, positive sentiment regarding defectors and Korean-Chinese, who are of the same ethnicity, is lower than that for foreign spouses and foreign workers, who are of different ethnicities. Additionally, the difference in positive evaluations between the two groups for the most positively viewed group, foreign spouses, is 5.4 percentage points, whereas the difference for the most negatively viewed group, Korean-Chinese, is a significant 9.3 percentage points. Support for Korean-Chinese, moreover, is significantly lower among both young adults and adolescents relative to other foreigner groups.

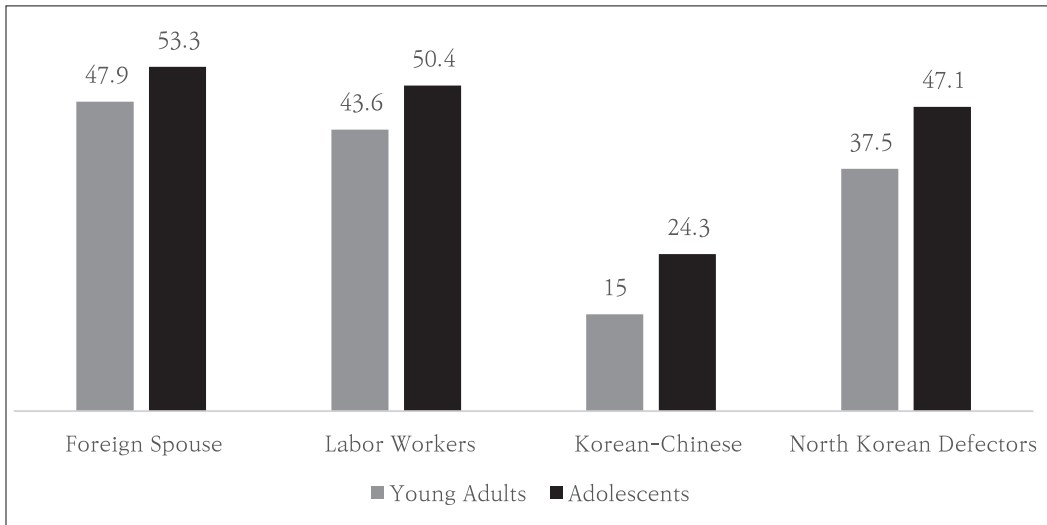


Figure 1. Sentiment towards foreigner groups (young adults and adolescents)

The table below then shows the distribution of responses to survey items regarding the role of the state when respondents are classified as progressive, moderate, or conservative based on their self-reported political ideology. Overall, there is little difference between young adults and teenagers in the response distribution concerning government roles based on political ideology. Progressive young adults are more likely than their conservative counterparts to oppose non-elected leaders governing the state even in crisis situations and believe the government should always adhere to the law. Furthermore, 81.2% of progressive respondents believe that anti-government protests should be allowed even during national crises, compared to 60.1% of conservative respondents.

Importantly, the difference in opinions between progressive and conservative young adults is similarly reflected in the teenage group. Progressive teenagers are statistically significantly more likely than their conservative counterparts to oppose non-elected leaders, believe the government must always follow the law, and support allowing anti-government protests. This similarity in issue attitudes between young adults and teenagers suggests that teenagers' political ideologies are consistent and well-developed.

Regression Results

As shown above, political ideology displayed relatively consistent results among young Korean adults and Korean youth. For the purpose of this study, however, it is important to examine whether this consistency can be seen in regard to attitudes toward foreigners. As previously mentioned, existing studies on the general adult electorate indicate that political ideology significantly impacts attitudes toward foreigners. Conservatives, who value tradition, security, and social homogeneity, tend to have negative attitudes toward foreigners, viewing them as potential threats to economic resources and cultural norms. In contrast, progressives, who value equality, diversity, and globalization, show positive attitudes, supporting the acceptance and support of refugees and immigrants. They also believe that foreign workers contribute to economic growth by providing necessary labor. The table below presents the OLS regression results of attitudes

Table 1. Distribution of responses on government role (young adults and adolescents)

		Strong leader		Government breaking laws		Allow protests	
		Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve
Young adults	Progressive	73.1	26.9	72.1	27.9	18.8	81.2
	Moderate	69.5	30.5	59.9	40.1	32.8	67.2
	Conservative	54.0	46.0	56.0	44.0	39.9	60.1
	Overall	67.2	32.8	63.6	36.4	29.1	70.9
	Chi-square (p-value)	26.7/p=.00		20.6/p=.00		11.6/p=.00	
		Strong leader		Government breaking laws		Allow protests	
		Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve
Adolescents	Progressive	65.0	35.0	61.6	38.4	29.3	70.7
	Moderate	65.2	34.8	56.5	43.5	33.2	66.8
	Conservative	55.0	45.0	50.7	49.3	43.5	56.5
	Overall	63.1	36.9	56.8	43.2	34.1	65.9
	Chi-square (p-value)	7.4/p=.03		5.98/p=.05		11.6/p=.00	

Table 2. OLS Regressions on foreigner sentiment: Young adults and adolescents

	Young Adults				Adolescents			
	Foreign spouse	Labor workers	Korean-Chinese	North Korean defectors	Foreign spouse	Labor workers	Korean-Chinese	North Korean defectors
Constant	1.81	1.59	1.40	1.36	0.89	0.85	1.00	0.78
Gender	-0.02	-0.01	0.13	0.01	0.10*	0.06	0.16*	0.12*
Political ideology	-0.01	-0.03*	-0.09*	-0.03*	0.01	0.01	-0.04*	-0.02
Political interest	0.03	-0.01	0.01	0.06*	0.00	0.01	-0.14*	0.02
Economic help	0.11*	0.15*	0.02	0.13*	0.23*	0.24*	0.03	0.24*
Contribution to development	0.12*	0.21*	0.40*	0.20*	0.16*	0.19*	0.38*	0.17*
Korean pride	0.12*	0.06*	-0.05	0.03*	0.11*	0.06*	0.05	0.11*
Care responsibility	0.18*	0.22*	0.04	0.25*	0.27*	0.27*	0.19*	0.25*

*P<0.05, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001

toward different foreign groups for young adults and teenagers.

The regression results from both young Korean adults and Korean teenagers indicates that attitudes toward foreigners are positively influenced by perceptions of their economic contributions, the belief that foreigners make the country a better place to live, and high national pride. The more respondents believe that foreigners contribute to the country’s development and feel pride as Koreans, the more positive their attitudes toward foreigners become. Additionally,

those who believe that the state's role includes caring for minorities are more likely to have a positive perception of foreigners, indicating that teenagers are more likely to view immigrants as minorities more so than young adults.

A significant difference between young adults and teenagers is the influence of political ideology on attitudes toward foreigners. Among young adults, political ideology significantly affects attitudes toward foreign workers (-0.03), Korean-Chinese (-0.09), and North Korean defectors (-0.03), with the exception of foreign spouses (-0.01) which still shows a negative coefficient. The negative coefficients for all groups indicate that more conservative respondents tend to have negative attitudes toward these groups. Moreover, the coefficient for attitudes towards Korean-Chinese is particularly big at -0.09, suggesting that political ideology has a substantial impact on this group's perception.

In contrast, among the youth, political ideology is not statistically significant for foreign spouses (0.01), foreign labor workers (0.01), and North Korean defectors (-0.02), with Korean-Chinese (-0.04) being the only exception and showing the largest coefficient. This suggests that teenagers' evaluations of foreigners are not influenced by their political ideology. It also suggests that Korean-Chinese are an outlier.

Compared to young adults, moreover, teenagers' positive attitudes are more strongly influenced by their belief that foreigners contribute to the economy and to society as well as the state's role in caring for social minorities. Specifically, there is a statistically significant and positive association between contribution to development and positive sentiment for all foreigner groups as well as government care for minorities and positive sentiment for all foreigner groups. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between perceived economic contribution and positive sentiment along with national pride and positive sentiment for all foreigner groups with the exception of Korean-Chinese, which is positive but statistically insignificant for both indicators.

To sum up, while the consistency of political ideology among teenagers is similar to that of young adults, political ideology significantly influences young adults' attitudes toward foreigners but not teenagers' attitudes. Teenagers' positive evaluations of foreigners are more influenced by their sense of national pride, their belief in foreigners' economic contributions, and their opinion that the state should support social minorities, since they may view foreigners as minorities living in the country.

Discussion and Conclusion

South Korea is often hailed as a democratization success story, yet the country continues to grapple with cultural and social challenges. Various forms of social inequality persist in the country, with one of the most notable being the widespread hostility and trepidation towards foreigners. This is particularly striking given Korea's demographic challenges, with a declining population and a rapid transition into a multicultural society (Lee et al., 2024).

This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it investigates anti-foreigner sentiment in South Korea, a country that continues to rapidly change in terms of its population demographics. While numerous studies have extensively examined the rise of anti-foreigner sentiment globally, there are still, relatively, limited studies on this in the case of South Korea. Moreover, the relationship between political ideologies and sentiment towards foreigners, immigrants, and minorities, though well-researched in other contexts, remains relatively understudied in the Korean context. As a country with a history of ethnic and racial homogeneity (Shin, 2006) and one that continues to harbor high levels of xenophobia and negative attitudes towards immigrants (Kim, 2011), it is important to examine these evolving trends within a

consolidated democracy like South Korea.

Second, the study findings highlight the importance of examining sentiments towards foreigners not just in the adult population but also among the youth, a demographic that has been largely overlooked in existing research. Despite being more affected by societal transformations and potentially more concerned about immigration than older generations, adolescents are often excluded from studies on foreigner sentiment. Their influence on society will be significant and will only grow in the future. However, comprehensive research on Korean youth, particularly students, and their evolving social values, political orientations, and attitudes remains limited. Therefore, further research is needed to gauge these changing dynamics among the youth.

Third, this study explores attitudes towards different groups of foreigners, addressing a gap in existing literature. Previous studies often focus on single foreigner groups or fail to examine variations in attitudes across different groups, hindering generalization. However, sentiments toward immigrants differ significantly worldwide due to a variety of factors, including economic, social, cultural, ideological, religious, generational, and geographical issues. Therefore, in Korea, examining immigrant groups separately is important due to the country's homogenous nature and the rapid influx of different immigrant groups. While our study is preliminary, it represents one of the first attempts to gauge these differences by broadly examining these foreigner groups.

Finally, the findings suggest that, among both young adults and the youth, political ideology can influence their attitudes towards the role of the state and equality. When it comes to foreigner sentiment, however, political ideology is a significant determinant among young Korean adults but less so among Korean youth. Rather, among the youth, more practical and humanistic determinants play a more critical role in influencing attitudes towards different foreigner groups. For adolescents, the positive contributions that foreigners make to society, whether economic or social, as well as the government's efforts to help minorities and those in need, are more important indicators than political ideology or political reasons in general. The results thus suggest that sentiment towards foreigners among the youth fundamentally derive from more practical and humanistic factors than that of adults, and these determinants should be explored further since the youth will play a vital role in integrating immigrant groups and in shaping the country's future policies and norms.

Notwithstanding these contributions, the study has certain limitations. In particular, while this study examines four immigrant groups, future research should conduct a more detailed analysis by adding additional groups of foreigners into their analysis. Moreover, analyzing Korean-Chinese and North Korean defectors alongside other ethnically Korean groups may yield valuable insights, given the existing stereotypes surrounding these groups. Lastly, the results highlight Korean-Chinese as an outlier group, and further research is needed to understand the underlying reasons for these results.

Still, this study highlights the importance of discussing political ideology and immigrant sentiment in Korea, and it also brings attention to the significance of exploring generational divisions by comparing young adults to adolescents. To develop a successful multicultural society, efforts from various fronts are needed to improve immigrant sentiment among various groups within the general population and help foreigners living in Korea better integrate into society.

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Notes

1. Immigrants are often used to describe people who live in a different country while foreigners can include those who are not immigrants, e.g. those visiting. However, because this study examines all individuals who are perceived as outsiders, it will utilize both terms.
2. This study examines high school students, and to describe this group, the terms “youth,” “teenagers,” “high school students,” and “adolescents” are all used. Similarly, the adult population incorporated in this study consists of those between the ages of 18 to 24 years old, and as such, the term “young adults” will be most used throughout the manuscript.
3. Korean-Chinese usually consist of ethnic Koreans who live in China. This group, also called Joseonjeok or Chaoxianzu, can also consist of those now living in Korea but are the descendants of Koreans who migrated to China in the late 1800s and the early 1900s (Seol and Skrentny 2004). Korean-Chinese living in Korea are ethnically Korean, but they are still perceived to be different from Korean citizens due to their ancestry and experiences living abroad. As a result, this study calls this group of ethnic Koreans who come from China as “Korean-Chinese.”
4. This includes various country and regional contexts such as Europe (Leykin & Gorodzeisky, 2023; Saxton & Benson, 2003), East Asia (Barceló, 2016; Chung, 2020; Ramsay & Pang, 2017), and the United States (Brooks et al., 2016; Butz & Kehrberg, 2019; Haubert & Fussell, 2006; Kiehne & Ayon, 2016).
5. In fact, ethnic nationalism has dominated both policy debates as well as societal orientations in South Korea (Han & Lim, 2023), since South Koreans identify themselves as a collective and define themselves within the context of their relationships and roles in society (Campbell, 2015; Na, 2008), and in extreme situations, this can become a dangerous, divisive, and destructive force (Shin et al., 1999).
6. While not all these studies have placed political ideology at the center of their analyses, many studies still incorporate it as a control variable, suggesting that the relationship between political ideology and immigrant sentiment is evident and that studies should focus on this association.
7. In a similar vein, progressive-leaning governments have shown more open policies towards immigration relative to conservative-leaning administrations (Park, 2017).

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Appendix

Appendix A.

- 정치성향
 - 0: 진보, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: 중도, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10: 보수
- 국가 위기 상황 시 동의 정도 -
 1. 국가 위기 상황에서 필요하다면 선거로 뽑지 않은 강력한 지도자가 국가를 통치해도 된다
- 국가 위기 상황 시 동의 정도 -
 2. 국가 위기 극복을 위해서라면 정부는 법을 어겨서라도 일을 해내는 것이 중요하다
- 국가 위기 상황 시 동의 정도 -
 3. 국가 위기 상황이라도 정부에 반대하는 시위를 허용해야 한다

Appendix B.

- 귀하의 성별은 무엇입니까? 1. 남성, 2. 여성
- 정치에 대한 관심
 - 1. 매우 관심이 있다
 - 2. 조금 관심이 있다
 - 3. 별로 관심이 없다
 - 4. 전혀 관심이 없다
- 이민자들의 한국 경제 도움 정도에 대한 의견
 - 1. 매우 손해가 된다
 - 2. 약간 손해가 된다
 - 3. 별다른 영향이 없다
 - 4. 약간 도움이 된다
 - 5. 매우 도움이 된다
- 이민자들이 한국을 더 살기 좋은 곳으로 만드는지에 대한 의견
 - 1. 훨씬 더 살기 나쁜 곳으로 만든다
 - 2. 약간 더 살기 나쁜 곳으로 만든다
 - 3. 별다른 영향이 없다
 - 4. 약간 더 살기 좋은 곳으로 만든다
 - 5. 훨씬 더 살기 좋은 곳으로 만든다

- 본인이 한국인이라는 것에 대한 생각
 - 1. 전혀 자랑스럽지 않다
 - 2. 별로 자랑스럽지 않다
 - 3. 보통이다
 - 4. 약간 자랑스럽다
 - 5. 매우 자랑스럽다

- 정부 책임 정도 - 가난하고 도움이 필요한 사람들을 돌보는 것
 - 1. 책임이 없다
 - 2. 일부만 책임이 있다
 - 3. 상당 부분 책임이 있다
 - 4. 전적으로 책임이 있다

Appendix C.

- 대상에 대한 생각: 우리나라 사람과 결혼한 외국인 (결혼이주여성)
- 대상에 대한 생각: 우리나라에서 일하는 외국인 노동자
- 대상에 대한 생각: 우리나라에서 사는 조선족 동포
- 대상에 대한 생각: 우리나라에서 사는 북한 이탈 주민